

Lakenheath 2005



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Commander, 48th Fighter Wing





READY

As I watched the smoke pour from the gaping hole in the World Trade Center, I had an uneasy premonition it signaled what we would all observe with horrid certitude when the second aircraft struck only minutes later. Returning to the Pentagon's National Military Command Center (NMCC), American flight 77 hit our building. Attesting to the structure's integrity, I didn't hear the impact, only the alarms fueling an initial belief among the scurrying evacuees that a bomb had gone off. Entering the NMCC, its compartmented spaces were already filled with an acrid smoke, but this did nothing to damper the flurry of activity as our command structure began shutting down the nation's airways to preclude further attacks. Surveying the frenetic scene, what, I wondered, had prepared us for this?

In reflection the answer I believe was both nothing and everything. No one had prepared to any degree for an internal attack on the United States; yet the actions of those Soldiers, Sailors, Marines and Airmen that day was a testament to their training—their ability to adapt to the situation at hand. In those chaotic hours is a lesson for us all. Our mission is to be ready: ready to go anywhere, anytime our nation asks. But the question that follows closely, of course, is “to do what?”

The answer is both simple and daunting: whatever needs done.



HERE RESTS IN HONORED GLORY
A COMRADE IN ARMS
KNOWN BUT TO GOD

“our
mission....anywhere, anytime..
..whatever needs done”



“...focus on support to ground forces engaged in stabilization operations.”

FOCUSED

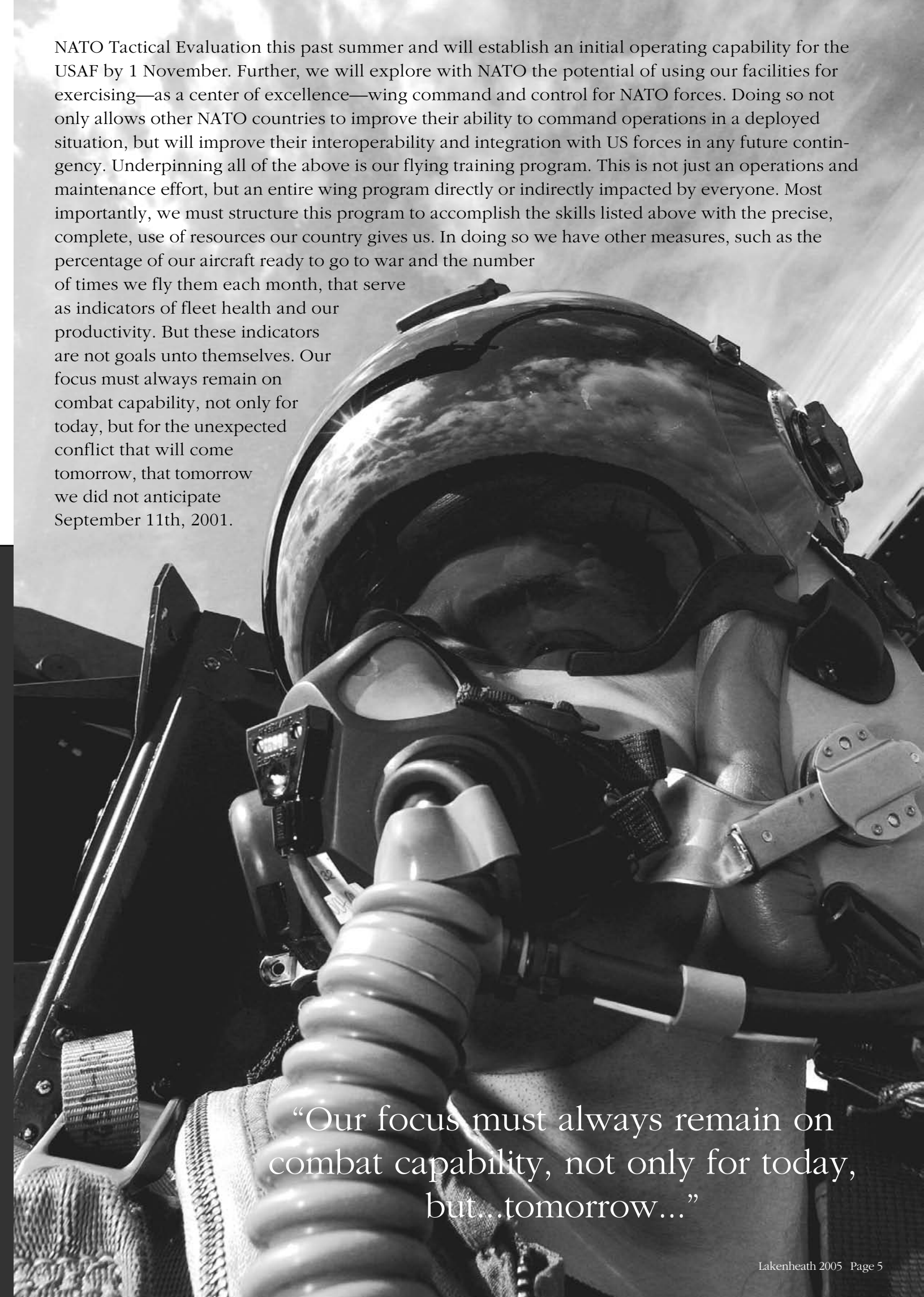
Such a broad expanse runs risk that in pursuit of all we master nothing. But that need not be the case with proper focus. First and foremost we must emphasize fundamentals. Like practicing scales on a piano, knowing the basics allows us to adapt to complex, evolving situations. In training, I want commanders to first develop programs that emphasize a sound foundation by limiting the scope of what's taught and ensuring enough repetition to ingrain basic skills. Whether it's following tech orders or learning how to fly line abreast, we must have these foundations in place before we can focus on specific combat operations.

Such follow-on preparation requires us to maintain close contact with similar deployed forces and the capabilities the theater commander currently desires. This current experience tells us we should focus on support to ground forces engaged in stabilization operations with missions such as convoy patrol, mortar suppression, and rapid destruction of unplanned targets in populated areas. Accordingly we will focus more of our training on emerging targets, attacking them precisely, regardless the weather, day or night, with special emphasis on coordinating with ground forces who can aid us in locating the enemy.

At the same time, though of lower priority, we cannot let our focus on ongoing operations completely stunt our ability to execute other missions, missions which run the full gamut of air force capabilities. Especially important is our continued evolution adapting our new aircraft modifications and weapons to support the rapid, precise targeting of the enemy in the air or on the ground.


In conjunction with our training we must have in place a self-assessment and exercise program that will challenge us to react to unexpected situations; by doing so we will embed those skills that will sustain us when such contingencies occur.

Finally, our ability in the air means nothing unless we are able to successfully receive, understand, plan and then launch the mission the combatant commander wants us to fly. The nerve center directing this effort for our wing will be our Expeditionary Operations Center (EOC.) The 48th Fighter Wing is not only USAFE's only lead expeditionary wing, and therefore responsible for providing this command and control for potential future contingencies, but the lead for the USAF in developing the EOC prototype for all future contingency operations. We exercised this system during our



NATO Tactical Evaluation this past summer and will establish an initial operating capability for the USAF by 1 November. Further, we will explore with NATO the potential of using our facilities for exercising—as a center of excellence—wing command and control for NATO forces. Doing so not only allows other NATO countries to improve their ability to command operations in a deployed situation, but will improve their interoperability and integration with US forces in any future contingency. Underpinning all of the above is our flying training program. This is not just an operations and maintenance effort, but an entire wing program directly or indirectly impacted by everyone. Most importantly, we must structure this program to accomplish the skills listed above with the precise, complete, use of resources our country gives us. In doing so we have other measures, such as the percentage of our aircraft ready to go to war and the number of times we fly them each month, that serve as indicators of fleet health and our productivity. But these indicators are not goals unto themselves. Our focus must always remain on combat capability, not only for today, but for the unexpected conflict that will come tomorrow, that tomorrow we did not anticipate September 11th, 2001.

“Our focus must always remain on combat capability, not only for today, but...tomorrow...”



**“I loved it here, but I
don’t want to come
back.”**

**But folks do come back...
Why?**

Driving to Bury St. Edmunds for their annual Battle of Britain commemoration, the narrow lanes cutting across the rolling fields reminded me of other isolated country roads half a world away in my native North Carolina. The contrast of both could not be starker than the daily grind I endured for years, suffering along with countless legions of other commuters making our daily pilgrimage to the inner sanctums of the Washington Beltway. The serenity of the short journey evoked a small prayer of thanks for being here with my family and allowing them to have some small sense of what I so richly enjoyed as a young boy. There is clarity here, uncluttered as we are by the frenzy that all too often describes daily life in urban America. We know why we are here. To guard the freedoms of Americans and those who help us in this endeavor. But not all of you share that view. Our climate survey last fall showed that we at Lakenheath, more so than other fighter wing in Europe, perceive that we’re undermanned and overworked. In fact, that’s been the perception at Lakenheath for a number of years. And while past surveys show this perception is improving, some still remark as they leave “I loved it here, but I don’t want to come back.”

But folks do come back, and in large numbers. Why?

Well, first of all, the grass always looks greener on the other side of the fence. But I learned as a child—when I jumped the fence into my cousin’s pasture—that tall green grass hides a lot of cow pies, which has a lot to do with why that grass is so green. I think a lot of these folks that come back to Lakenheath learned as I did, that the grass in my back yard is actually pretty nice.

A black and white photograph of a person, likely an athlete, in a starting crouch on a track. The person is wearing a dark, short-sleeved shirt and shorts. Their hands are on the ground, and their feet are positioned for a start. The background is dark and out of focus.

“Not only are basic skills important, but...a broad array...we’ll need you to use to adapt to the unexpected.”

That’s not to say we’re not busy here. But we’re busy getting ready to go fight, and fight we do. When I look at down range “stats”, it’s black and white: if you want it killed first-time, on-time, call the Liberty Wing. And they do call and they will continue to call and we will always be ready to answer that call. That ever-ready posture, for anything, keeps our pace and intensity high; and that tires people out after a time; especially when they perceive a lot of their time is eaten by tasks not focused on the near-term fight I spoke of earlier.

But you have to remember that our mission is not to be just focused on the near-term, but the long-term, unexpected—and inevitable—fight; a fight whose character we cannot know with certainty; yet one we can shape the way we want, but only if we maintain a broad array of capabilities gained by performing tasks that may not be immediately applicable to ongoing combat operations.

That’s why, for you airmen and NCOs as well as officers, not only are basic skills important, but so is additional education and diverse reading that brings to your plate a broad array of skills; those unknown skills we’ll need you to use to adapt to the unexpected. That’s also why I need everyone working out and physically fit, so that you are not only healthier and more productive day-to-day, but you have the capability to endure unanticipated hardship at that future, unknown expeditionary base weighed down with full body armor, helmet and chemical gear with an M-16 strapped to your back.

So, in sum, why do people keep coming back? Well simply, while it’s nice to take a break now and then on the bench, most folks want to be in the starting line-up, especially for the Superbowl Champs.

Don’t think my rosy outlook means we’re not trying to address both the perception and the reality of Lakenheath. Our entire Air Force is re-looking its manning structure to put folks where we need them most; just realize though, that this process, while on-going, will take time. Meanwhile, we’re improving the way we do business here such as the many innovations we’ve had in aircraft sortie production over the last year and a simplification in the way we execute training; initiatives we’ll sustain with more forthcoming.

As a small example, by this time next year you should have widely available, at a much reduced cost, broadband internet access. At the same time, we're going to make it possible for you to access the resources on our base network from your dorm room and your homes. Coupled together, these capabilities will allow you to do much of the other "stuff" that currently eats into your day when you want to do it. You won't be doing less, but you'll be able to do it in less time.

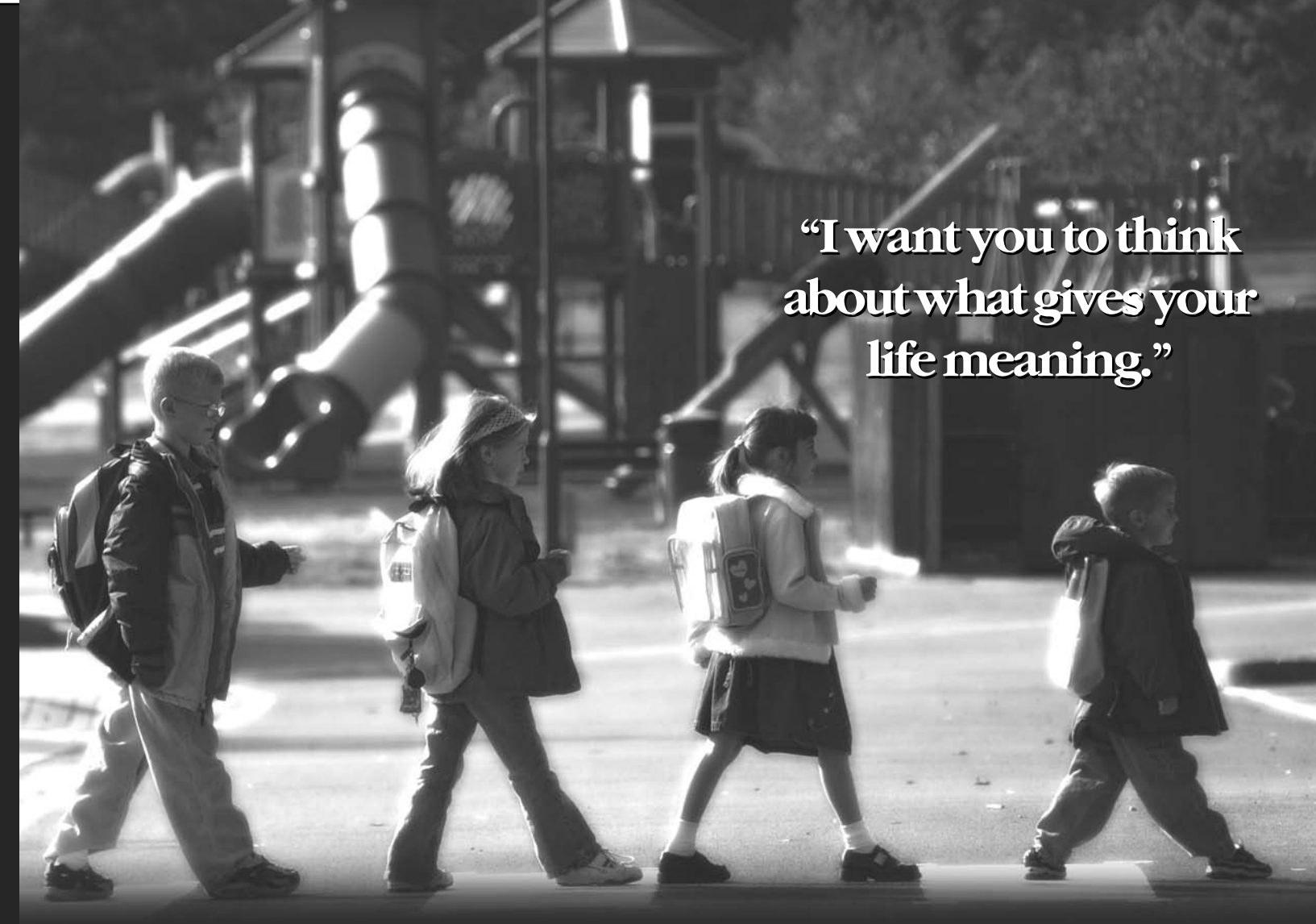
And your time is important. In fact, it's your most important resource and you should treat it as such. How? I want every member of this wing to take more time to focus on the big "why?", that is, "why am I doing this?"

You will never be in a better place to explore this question. This country we're in, especially this part of England, fundamentally shaped the nature of our country today. You would well serve your country by knowing better England, its history, and its people. For not only do we share a common heritage, but we pursue a shared path today. It is in England and through England that we have foremost a portal into those nations, most notably embodied in our NATO alliance, that seek a common course of freedom and self determination for all countries. We are the spine that gives shape and strength to that form, a role we best accomplish by knowing the body we inhabit.

So I want your weekends here in England free. I want you to take your thirty days of leave every year. Go see your commanders now and set your dates. I want you to learn. I want you to travel around the United Kingdom and Europe. I want you to meet people and talk to them about what's important to them and what's important to you. Volunteer to help in community projects. Seek and build opportunities to bring our British guest on base to aid us with their expertise as well. That's much of the reason your moms and dads, brothers and sisters—the American taxpayers—are paying for you to be here. So go do it. It's important for you and our country.

**"You won't be doing less,
but you'll be able to do it
in less time"**





**“I want you to think
about what gives your
life meaning.”**

But there's one other thing I want you to do. I want you to take some of your precious time—not just on weekends, but every day—to just sit and think, beyond what I've discussed above. I want you to think about what gives your life meaning. That's a hard task. We have a lot of folks here who can help in that regard, most notably our Chaplain corps and a lot of outreach programs such as Combat Touch under which auspices we'll have a new “Haven” opening near the dorms this fall. You also have your First Shirts and supervisors, and a new program to lend some structure to this endeavor—Project Connect by which we will pair mentors with younger members of our force. But none of these can succeed without your dedication of some of your time and effort to first think and then participate. If you do this, you'll find yourself elevated to a higher plane, one where you'll discover that what brings meaning to your life more so than any other endeavor is your service to others.



Mutual support...is the life-blood of all who would call themselves Airmen.

That service to others starts with the person beside you. The wingman concept is fundamental to those who fight in the air. Ever since the days of Rickenbacker and Luke, airmen have depended on the irreducible bond of trust engendered when one places one's life in the hands of another. But this concept is not isolated to the cockpit. Mutual support, dependence on our wingman, is the lifeblood of all who would call themselves airmen.

Some months ago I spoke to you of the term "press", a simple word that seals this contract of trust. Through our safety office you will see this term become a part of your daily lexicon, because through it I want you to manifest this mutual trust among each other.

This trust shows itself in many ways. It is the companion who volunteers himself as the designated driver before leaving the base and has the discipline to completely abstain from alcohol. It is the friend who accompanies you to the club and takes it upon herself to see to your welfare when she realizes you have had too much to drink. It is embodied in the mutual respect we have for each other as airmen that precludes us from taking advantage of another, man or woman, when their judgment has been diminished. It's that sense of commitment to pick up the slack when we deploy our forces forward. It's that sense of family that implores us to take care of those left behind as we would take care of our own, because they are our own.

Concurrent with this campaign will be our renewed effort to promote the responsible use of alcohol. The fact is alcohol is a drug. It reduces inhibition and diminishes judgment. It leads to not only drunk driving convictions, huge monetary loss, and destroyed careers, but has been a factor in over 80% of the sexual assaults that have occurred on Lakenheath.

Coupled with our renewed focus to show all of you what is important in your lives, the importance of what you do for the Air Force and your country, we hope to show you that life offers many rewarding paths which can only be blocked by substance abuse. Our message is simple and clear: life is wonderful and no where is it more wonderful than is right here at Lakenheath.

PROUD

Our outward appearance is a reflection of our inner pride and that pride led to our winning USAFE's first-ever COMBAT PROUD competition and a \$100,000 which we will use to renovate our Defender Park.

You'll see more improvements over the next months with focus on the north base areas, RAF Feltwell, the opening of our 48th Avenue Club, construction of a lighted, off-track running path, the opening of the first phase of our gym early next year (with a vastly improved cardiovascular room) and a renovated BX, commissary, swimming pool and a new skate park. You will see tremendous efforts to improve our housing for both unaccompanied and married personnel as we start new construction for an airmen's dorm and renovate our on-base housing south of Lord's Walk, housing we hope to augment with a proposal to build almost 600 new homes nearby for our combined Lakenheath/ Mildenhall community.

All these changes are testaments to our commitment to our local community with whom our relationships have never been more important than now. Accordingly we're creating new forums to involve local governing bodies in discussions over events that will impact the community, especially ones affecting the number of people we assign here, the services we need, and the construction to support both. In this same regard, we will increase the opportunities for all our people to involve themselves in our communities; not only to repay their kindness but to show them what is so special about Americans, especially the Americans of the Liberty Wing!



“...changes are testaments to our commitment to our local community with whom our relationships have never been more important..”



LAKENHEAVEN

In short, Lakenheath is a great place and getting better. That's what I believe and a large part of your believing it is having the faith that your leadership is working to make these goals and visions a reality. But we can't do this alone. We are a team and we will succeed or fail as a team. That's my challenge to you for the coming year. Make this base, make this wing, and make this next year the best of your Air Force career. Commit yourself to this goal and you will find, as I have, that you've found a little corner of heaven, a place called Lakenheath, home of the best fighter wing in the United States Air Force, the Liberty Wing!

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